

Children's Ground

Submission to the

Productivity Commission into 'Expenditure on Children in the
Northern Territory'

Submitted: 17 July 2019

Submission relevance

Children's Ground commends the Australian Government on undertaking this critically important Productivity Commission into 'Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory'.

This Productivity Commission is particularly relevant to Children's Ground because a core element of our approach has been to reform funding models and allocations, as well as systems and service delivery to improve agency, empowerment and long-term outcomes for children and their families who live with entrenched generational poverty and disadvantage.

Previous reviews and Productivity Commissions have identified that the current service systems are broken¹. Child and family services have become increasingly fragmented and targeted, resulting in a piecemeal approach of fractured service and program funding and delivery. In some areas the impact of this has been catastrophic for children, families and communities – it has resulted in increasing the complexity of the issues people are experiencing, and a service system that cannot keep pace with changes in families, communities, society and government.

Many government and non-government services have wonderful visions that start with a focus on people and outcomes. However, realising this vision can be compromised by the way the funding and service systems function. Funding and delivery are influenced by political cycles, changes in government ministers and staff and policy platforms. Extremely targeted and limited funding allocations are resulting in constant referrals of people between services and systems. For those most in need, service systems are often inaccessible, cannot respond to their multiple needs and these children and families are falling through the gaps of siloed service delivery.

Our major service sectors of education, health and wellbeing, economic and social support cater to the mainstream but are failing those at the margins of economic, cultural and social privilege. For government and non-government services there is minimal funding focused on prevention. Too often, child and family services are funded to respond and react to the crisis that ensues from failed outcomes in education, health, social and economic inclusion. Rather than redress inequity, the person is defined by their problem. Rather than recognise the need to fix the system, our efforts are driven towards fixing the individual. The existing system fails to focus on creating the conditions for prevention. Yet the evidence for the effectiveness and efficacy of prevention rather than treatment is clear, in respect of both cost and social impact.

Decades of national and international research and reviews have consistently found and articulated core elements of 'evidence-based practice' that are important in achieving sustainable change and impact for children, families and communities experiencing extreme disadvantage. Yet policy, service and program funding and delivery in the NT has not been able to effectively respond to these findings and achieve service systems that provide equitable access and engagement for all. This is evidenced by minimal change in key Closing the Gap targets over eleven years.

This Productivity Commission is timely for both levels of government funding and service delivery in the NT. Despite significant efforts and financial investment, there has been minimal progress in Closing the Gap targets and inadequate child and family service funding models; design and delivery for First Nations people are an entrenched pattern across NT service sectors and systems – at all

¹ Australian Government Productivity Commission. 2017. Introducing Competition and Informed User Choice into Human Services: Reforms to Human Services.

levels of government. Children and families cannot continue to be exposed to services and programs that are short-lived, not locally relevant and inaccessible to many due to language, remoteness and cultural barriers.

Context to this submission

Children's Ground was established as an alternative system model. This submission is presented for the Productivity Commission to consider the structural and funding reform required to support such a system. The submission is not presented to advocate for Children's Ground as an organisation. The Children's Ground Approach is an approach that can be delivered by one or a number of organisations. It is premised on our experience that most communities have services of strength that focus on part or one aspect of the Children's Ground Approach. There remains an enduring challenge in most communities to integrate, achieve community/user decision making and cultural safety and deliver opportunities that prevent both acute and long-term trauma and stress. Children's Ground is designed as a 25-year system to achieve these outcomes. We advocate for NT expenditure to be directed towards a more systemic long-term view on the needs of children through the life course that privileges their culture and identity.

Children's Ground was designed to redress the failings of current service systems. The Children's Ground Approach (CG Approach) was designed by First Nations people in the Northern Territory (NT) for First Nations Territorians. It was established to create change with communities who experience exclusion and inequity within current service systems of education, health, housing, social and economic support – which perpetuates their experience of social and economic disadvantage. While the CG Approach was designed by and for First Nations communities, the model can be implemented with any community experiencing multiple and complex disadvantage, inequity and exclusion.

Children's Ground's systems and service reform focusses funding on prevention and early intervention in relation to all social and cultural determinants of health and wellbeing. It shifts decision-making and service delivery from a top down approach to one where bottom-up community and consumer-led governance, delivery and evaluation is central. Creating high quality life opportunities, preventing harm to children and ensuring that all children grow up in positive and safe environments requires family and community leadership and empowerment. Critically, Children's Ground does not support deficit approaches for children. Children are considered capable and talented, requiring the right conditions and quality opportunities to exercise, express and develop these talents.

Children's Ground works firmly in the space of prevention and early intervention, based on the principle of universal equity, rather than equality alone. While universal services are and should be equally available to all children and families, Children's Ground recognises that universal equity ensures children and families access the services they need as they need them, and that some will require more services and support than others at points in time.

The Children's Ground Approach is a 25-year integrated approach to child, family and community wellbeing. It includes implementing and evidencing reform in:

- Five systemic areas that create enabling conditions for change: Governance; Workforce; Services; Investment; and Evidence

- An integrated service platform of prevention including: Learning and Wellbeing; Family Health and Wellbeing; Community Development and Wellbeing; Economic Development and Wellbeing; and Cultural and Creative Development and Wellbeing.
- Nine practice principles which guide how Children's Ground works with the community: Start early; Critical mass (work with everyone); Child, family and community led; Deliver the whole, not the bits; In community; Innovation - combining the best of the old and the new; Assume and celebrate ability (strength based); Expect and deliver excellence; and Stay for the long-term.

Early evidence from our longitudinal evaluation has shown a cost- effective and efficient funding, systems and service delivery model that is demonstrating short-term impact (after three years) as building blocks to long-term change for children and their families.

For the children growing up within a Children's Ground Approach a new 'normal' is being experienced - it includes; children having their culture and language valued and privileged, children participating in early learning programs from birth alongside their families; school aged children (previously not engaging in school) having support and opportunities to learn in a different environment that better meets their individual needs; children learning about and leading their own health, learning and wellbeing; children participating in extended hours learning programs after school and during holiday periods; families involved in setting goals for their children's learning and wellbeing, and playing their important role of their child's first teachers; children spending time with their family in positive and safe environments where their language and culture is visible and valued; children learning on their country, about their country and from cultural/community leaders and their family; children seeing their families engaged in employment; children seeing their families access health and wellbeing services with success because they are adequately informed and supported to do so; children seeing their families advocate for their own needs, such as housing, health and finances. For children, each of these experiences is shaping who they are now and who they will become as adults.

Children's Ground is informed by leading evidence and practice. The new realities that children are experiencing (families being employed, family learning environment, culturally responsive environments, early childhood learning, individualised learning and health, safe environments etc.) are evidenced in global research as critical drivers to childhood learning and long-term development and wellbeing.

To contribute to the Productivity Commission's service mapping and stocktake exercise, the Children's Ground Approach is being delivered and evidenced with five communities across the NT. These include:

Central Australia

- Yarrenyty Arltere (Larapinta)
- Irrkerlantye (Whitegate)
- Mpweringke Anapipe (Northern Outstations)
- Ewyenper Atwatye (Hidden Valley town camp) – Community engagement and planning phase and early growth model implementation.

Top End

- West Arnhem Land

The Productivity Commission's Issues Paper asks for examples of best practice. Children's Ground was informed but not limited by leading practice in national and international research evidence bases. It is an example of best practice in funding and service delivery, designed by First Nations people in the NT. Practical elements of design, funding and delivery of the CG Approach are presented throughout this submission.

As a contribution to this Productivity Commission, we are pleased to share our experiences and evidence about how communities who have been excluded and disempowered in current service systems have become the designers, deliverers and evaluators of the CG Approach that is changing the daily experience for children and their families and creating a different future for their children.

For further information, 'An introduction to Children's Ground' is provided in Appendix one. Also attached to this submission is a summary of the evaluation of Children's Ground's implementation in Kakadu West Arnhem and a copy of Children's Ground's Family Health & Wellbeing Framework – *Health in the Hands of the People*. Collectively these documents will provide an in-depth understanding of how Children's Ground has achieved significant service, system and practice reform and early evidence of impact for children, families, and the community.

The Issues Paper also states that in addition to written submissions, meetings, community visits and potentially funding and delivering services in specific communities as case studies are also central to this consultation and reform process. Given the relevance and early evidence of the Children's Ground approach to what this Productivity Commission is seeking to understand and achieve, we suggest the following:

- Meeting with Children's Ground's Chair of the Board (William Tilmouth) and Chief Executive Officer (Jane Vadiveloo) to understand more about how Children's Ground prioritises funding allocation to achieve community-led, place-based and integrated service and system reform and delivery.
- Visiting Children's Ground's Central Australian communities and meeting with the Community Governance Group, staff and families to observe and understand how child and family services and systems can be genuinely led by communities in design, delivery and evaluation.
- Funding implementation of the CG Approach in a new community or contributing long-term funding within a current community to continue evidencing the positive impact for children, families and communities who have moved from being disempowered to being actively engaged in learning, health, employment and are creating positive and safe environments for their children.

We thank the Productivity Commission for considering our submission.

Children's Ground service and systems reform

This submission responds to many of the key questions outlined in the Productivity Commission's Issues Paper and is structured around the principles that guide the CG Approach and its reform of service systems. The nine principles include:

- Start early (prevention and early intervention)
- Deliver the whole, not the bits (integrated service delivery and social/cultural determinants)
- Child, family and community led
- Critical mass (work with everyone)
- In community (place-based)
- Innovation - combining the best of the old and the new
- Assume and celebrate ability (strength based)
- Expect and deliver the best (excellence)
- Stay for the long-term

These principles are 'how' Children's Ground is implementing and evidencing service and systems reform and are informed, but not limited by national and international evidence bases. They are a lens through which all policy development, funding and delivery models should be considered to achieve effective child and family centred service delivery and long-term sustained change and outcomes for children.

Start Early: Prevention and early intervention with children and their families

There is a wide range of child and family services and support across the NT, yet funding is largely allocated to secondary and tertiary services for treatment and response rather than prevention, early intervention and health/wellbeing promotion. The Productivity Commission 2017 Indigenous Expenditure Report reported that the majority of Government investment responds to the outcomes of disadvantage rather than strategies to reduce or overcome disadvantage - responding to crisis rather than investing adequately in prevention.²

There is adequate funding available for child and family service provision, however, rather than resourcing prevention, funding is instead largely focused secondary and tertiary service delivery to respond and treat, not prevent. Where services are funded for universal preventative approaches, it is often one-off programs seeking to create sustained change in only a few months or years. Minimal funding is allocated to embedding prevention into core services delivery at any level. Secondary and tertiary services are stretched due to decades of minimal comprehensive funding for prevention and due to the systemic failures that have created the entrenched crisis environments in which many families live, and in which services are attempting to make in-roads. In practice, due to the high burden of disease, current systems focus on disease over prevention. It structurally incentivises disease and deficit through funding allocation and service provision.

Investment in early childhood health, development and wellbeing is the ultimate form of prevention, and is well recognised by the World Health Organisation and United Nations as one of the most

² Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2017. 2017 Indigenous Expenditure Report, Productivity Commission, Canberra.

powerful equalisers in reducing health inequities within a generation³. The CG Approach delivers an integrated, holistic service platform that frontloads resources into prevention and responding to all social and cultural determinants of health, learning, wellbeing and life - it is a system of prevention for whole communities, with children at the centre.

Children's Ground begins by working with children pre-birth to eight years of age – and always working with their whole family rather than individuals alone. This recognises that the physical, social, emotional and economic health and wellbeing of all family members impacts children's wellbeing. The CG Approach is designed to turn the burden of ill-health in every family into a focus on health promotion, prevention and wellbeing over the course of a generation.

Prevention and health and wellbeing promotion are embedded into daily service delivery and life for children, families and the community. It takes learning, health promotion, social and economic engagement out of a service setting and into community environments. It includes early childhood development, health promotion, illness prevention, support for community and individual self-reliance and participation and activity in social and economic life.

Health promotion includes both first cultural health and global health knowledge and occurs in three main ways:

1. Health in Learning: Health and wellbeing is part of the learning curriculum from early childhood through to adulthood.
2. Health at Home: The family health team takes health and wellbeing to people where they live.
3. Health in Life: Creating environments of safety and the promotion of safety, health and wellbeing through daily activities, conversation and formal community governance structures.

Children's Ground is not a clinical health service. Rather, it is a community and preventative health approach that promotes cultural, physical and emotional wellbeing over the course of a generation to reduce the burden of trauma, chronic and acute health issues and to improve outcomes and health, education, social and economic life. Children's Ground is implemented alongside local clinical services in each community to support and create a bridge for increased engagement in and coordination of clinical services as needed.

An NT child and family service funding and delivery framework should mirror public health frameworks. Currently funding allocations and subsequently service provision is not proportional to a preventative public health approach. Furthermore, a child and family service framework should include all services that respond to all social and cultural determinants of health, because these are also the determinants of outcomes in lifelong learning, social and economic participation.

³ See, for example, these two reports: World Health Organisation Commission on Social Determinants of Health., 2008. Closing the gap in a generation: Health equity through action on the social determinants of health: Commission on Social Determinants of Health final report, Geneva, p.3. UN Secretary-General, 2015. Global strategy for women's, children's and adolescents' health (2016–2030). United Nations, New York, p.20.

Deliver the whole, not the bits: Integrated service delivery for key determinants

Many government and non-government service providers are focused on and funded to deliver the same or similar child and family services to the same communities and 'target groups'. Furthermore, new service providers and programs continue to creep into the landscape of NT services, without thorough scrutiny of the need for additional services, the duplication caused and the impact of more service providers seeking to engage with and service families and communities.

Competitive tenders coming from a range of different government departments within both NT and Federal government has seen children, families and whole communities targeted by many different service providers, all seeking to support them in one area of their life and lived experience. Over time this has resulted in duplicated funding and fragmented service delivery.

Recognising that the conditions within which children are born and raised determine their future opportunity, in each community, Children's Ground works intensively with children, their families and the whole community. Many services seek to support children and engage their families in that support – Children's Ground supports the whole family, including immediate and extended family. Children's Ground seeks to work with the whole community because all people surrounding children influence how they grow, development, learn and live.

An integrated or collaborative approach to child and family service delivery needs to go beyond current service trying to 'network' and work together. It needs to include all government and non-government service providers coming together at a systemic and senior level to create the policy and service conditions for working with communities using a place-based approach to holistically support children, families and whole communities with all of their priorities and solutions.

The types of services that should be defined as 'child and family services' should be centred around and dependent upon the local context. They should include services and supports identified by families as necessary to ensure their children grow up in positive, culturally rich and safe environments that provide the conditions for optimal child development and lifelong learning and wellbeing.

To achieve this, Children's Ground has reformed what services are delivered as key supports for holistic delivery of child and family support. The CG Approach brings together and integrates traditionally siloed services to address all the social and cultural determinants of health, learning and wellbeing. It goes beyond what are currently considered 'child and family' services. This comprehensive approach has been reinforced internationally as core to best practice models and a means of achieving equity in delivery and equality in outcomes.

Unlike many programs that attempt to make change by 'fixing' the individual through ad hoc and siloed programs, Children's Ground focuses on achieving lasting change by integrating services and supports that focus on addressing the interconnected causes of disadvantage.

Within Children's Ground's integrated service platform there are five operational areas considered to be core child and family services and supports:

1. **Learning and Wellbeing (education):** starting with a focus on early years learning in first language and English, with First Culture and English/Western learning occurring on country

and at the intergenerational community centre. As children grow, learning grows with them to include primary and secondary school education, and post-secondary vocational training.

2. **Family Health and Wellbeing (physical, cultural, social and emotional, and environmental health):** health promotion and prevention, nutrition, social and emotional wellbeing, environmental health, support to access and coordinate clinical health services and traditional healing. Delivery focuses on maternal, child and family health, health literacy and health agency.
3. **Economic Development and Wellbeing (employment, training and enterprise):** a local workforce, a curriculum and learning platform designed for future employment, support for transition to work, micro-financing and enterprise development.
4. **Community Development and Wellbeing (society, governance, culture and environment):** provision of integrated community/family centres where services are delivered. These centres promote and deliver community safety, community governance and the building of social, cultural and economic capital where people live.
5. **Cultural and Creative Development and Wellbeing (embedded across all areas):** embedded in learning, health, employment and community development, cultural knowledge systems and creative thinking are central to operations. They ensure children grow with a strong sense of identity and belonging with the knowledge systems and skills of their first cultures and languages. They also ensure children grow as creative thinkers, with flexible and adaptive skills to engage in a global environment with confidence.

These areas of service and support and how they are delivered creates the conditions for preventing risk factors for child abuse and neglect outlined in Table 2 of the Productivity Commission's Issues Paper.

In current service systems each of the above service types are available but are not easily accessible for all children and families, lacking clear pathways to and between services – particularly for those living with multiple complex needs. In the NT, each of these service types sit within separate systems, with separate funding allocations and governed by separate government departments across the three levels of Federal, Territory and Local government. This automatically creates systemic barriers and burdens in unnecessary administrative inefficiencies in cost and duplication, as well as requiring families to access multiple systems for universal services and support.

Some positive progress has been made in establishing an agreed medium-term (10-year) outcomes and plan for NT children, with integrated service delivery central to this plan. However, in practice attempts at integrated service delivery across the NT have primarily resulted funding allocations for infrastructure (Child & Family Centres) which in some places have achieved increased co-location of some child and family services. Yet services and programs remain funded by separate government departments with separate service output targets. Furthermore, service funding models have not moved beyond siloed funding based on outputs, rather than outcomes.

Integrated service delivery is about the service system working in the interest of the community that it services, not in the interest of their singular organisations – and this cannot be achieved without funding models and enabling environments within services at the practice and systemic level.

Child, family and community led

People who live with extreme social and economic disadvantage have less choice, less opportunity and less political voice. A key design of Children's Ground is to create the environment in which people have choice, are provided with the key information and resources to exercise that choice and then supported to be the key agents of change. This empowerment approach is necessary to achieve any significant sustained change in entrenched disadvantage.

Funding Aboriginal Controlled organisations and services is the right approach. They are well placed to deliver culturally safe and appropriate service and to build a local First Nations workforce. The provision of funding needs to include a lens and process to ensure that services go beyond Aboriginal controlled and are controlled by Aboriginal communities – hearing all voices. In funding allocations and frameworks, the extent to which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services are community controlled needs to be assessed at all levels of the service leadership, management, delivery and evaluation. Governments and services need to create the conditions for all service providers to be inclusive of and led by all language, family and clan groups within a community.

Systems and services must respond to the people for whom they are intended. Therefore, the CG Approach was design and is governed, delivered and evaluated by community and cultural leaders and families. It is an approach that empowers individuals, families and the wider community to lead the change they want to see. Only when people are the decision-makers, designers, deliverers and evaluators can genuine empowerment be achieved and have a positive impact.

Children's Ground has designed a model of community governance with and for the use of local communities, because agency is the single most important principle in achieving long-term change. Self-governance is not only an exercise in ensuring local people using a service can articulate their solutions and exercise their decisions. It is equally important to provide the support, resources and information within which the best decisions and solutions can be reached. This is critical to growing the next generation of young leaders and for long term success. Community and consumer governance reflect global best practice in community development and poverty alleviation. This is rarely achieved through singular top down governance mechanisms such as boards or even community advisory committees. It requires multiple governance mechanisms that recognise and embed service users, cultural governance and community governance.

First Nations communities have their own governance structures that have matured over 60,000 years and still form the underlying social and political structures to everyday life. Within the CG Approach First Nations systems of governance are respected and enacted. Children's Ground's governance and delivery model is the coming together of local community expertise and solutions, with external expertise in the areas of education, early childhood and community development. The vision of the local users is paramount in this relationship. The CG Approach can be delivered by community, for community with the partners of their choice.

While it is important to collect and learn from data about education, health, social and economic concerns and outcome inequality across the NT, it is time for services to provide the conditions in service design, delivery and evaluation that enable community leadership, agency and empowerment. This means not necessarily knowing the outcome of a service design planning session within a community. Rather, it requires being open and transparent with communities about

the resources available and the parameters in which service delivery is possible – and then responding to the locally developed solutions and service delivery models.

Caution needs to be applied in community engagement. In each community there are multiple services attempting to be community-led or co-designed. This has resulted in over burdening of families with expectations of engagement in 'consultation' about what they want and need without any real pathways to family and community led service design and delivery.

The role of the NT and Australian governments should be to work together to build service funding models that can facilitate the development of community-led service delivery models - which is the ownership and empowerment required to create conditions for prevention and behaviour change over the long-term.

Genuine community engagement and consultation requires respectful and reciprocal relationships and takes time - and cannot be achieved without building the relationships and taking the time. Governments and organisations need to move beyond seeing 'consultation' as the gold standard of community engagement and start to implement genuine community design of services. When positive relationships exist with leaders and people in communities, they actively engage in service planning and design.

Genuine engagement with communities requires action on the part of governments, organisations and services. Communities are more likely to actively engage when there is evidence of a long-term commitment to their community. Over decades many First Nations communities have been consulted time and time again – they have told and re-told their story and articulated their priorities and aspirations. However, this has often resulted in no feedback, no action or programs and services that were not in line with their priorities and designed for their community or by their community.

Within an overarching public health funding and service delivery framework, what and how services are delivered in each community should be decided and designed by each community. This then informs government funding allocations to communities through government and non-government service providers. This should include targets for the proportion of the service workforce that are local First Nations people. Only a local First Nations service delivery workforce can ensure the provision of culturally safe and appropriate services and programs, delivered in the first language of those they are seeking to engage and support.

Children's Ground works with communities where the majority of First Nations people are living below the poverty line and generational unemployment is common. Reform in workforce and employment is critical to achieve systems change and is key to the principle of being child, family and community-led. Children's Ground's flexible 'no barriers' approach to employment see Western trained service delivery staff work alongside First Nations staff in a 'peer-learning' environment. First Nations staff are ensuring culturally safe and appropriate service delivery and are learning Western sector knowledge and skills. Western staff are learning how to work in a cross-cultural environment and how to support the delivery of Western and cultural approaches and knowledge systems.

Soft entry points and variable hours contracts were important systemic enablers, from which people could build consistency and engagement in employment over time and at their own pace. In each community with which Children's Ground works, this has resulted in extensive First Nations employment because it has changed the system in terms of the way First Nations people, particularly those long-term unemployed, could engage in employment.

In addition, First Nations employment has benefits well beyond workforce and culturally safe service delivery, including but not limited to financial stability and security and positive role modelling for children. Through the CG Approach family employment is an enabler for child engagement in early learning. Analysis of Children's Ground's employment and learning participation data has also demonstrated a link between children's attendance in learning and their family's attendance in employment at Children's Ground.

Engaging local people as service delivery staff means they are the agents of change and this shifts their relationship with services from one of dependence and need to one of power and self-determination. The focus should be on building sustainable local workforce which creates empowerment. At the same time, it will address long term issues in remote communities including the challenges of workforce recruitment, retention and costly travel and service relevance.

A challenge with this approach is that for generations First Nations people have been passive recipients in services designed to support them. The time, training and support required to shift this is significant, but necessary for real change. It will require a long-term commitment in funding and delivery by governments and services. It will also require service providers to shift entrenched mindsets and ways of working from being the 'experts' to being partners with communities in service design and delivery – there is minimal evidence that this has been genuinely and effectively achieved systemically or in many practice examples to date.

Ultimately, investment in community designed, delivered and evaluated child and family services will create a new service system that includes delivery of both western and cultural approaches, which can enable education, health, wellbeing, social and economic inclusion.

Critical mass (work with everyone)

When the majority (a critical mass) of children and people within the community experience opportunity, safety and wellbeing, population and community level change (culturally, economically and socially) can be achieved over the long-term. Therefore, Children's Ground has moved away from the traditional approach of case managing targeted families and instead engages children and families across the entire community to lead to whole of community change from disadvantage to opportunity.

Current services are often funded for case management. Families are defined by their issue and targeted for support. They often have multiple case managers from multiple organisations/agencies – all of which are funded to support them in a singular issue.

Children's Ground's universal platform of early learning, employment and intergenerational community centre have health promotion embedded which means that everyone is engaged in positive environments and involved in prevention and wellbeing promotion. From this, staff work with individuals and families as priorities and concerns are identified and raised. Services and supports are delivered in different ways and places where people feel comfortable. Children and families are engaged in a positive, culturally and physically safe environment of learning, employment and social connection and from there they are supported with services – they are not engaged or defined by a problem.

Children Ground's funding model provides the flexibility, internal integration and practice framework for staff to support all children and their families whether they are experiencing one or multiple concerns at various points in time. A family's 'case file' is not closed when a concern has been resolved. Staff have ongoing relationships with all families and are available when needed to provide support and engage people in services. If children and families have clinical health or other needs not provided directly by Children's Ground, staff undertake supported referrals to other local services. Families are supported to engage with external services through transport, pre and post appointment/treatment conversations, attending service appointments with families if requested and coordinating external service provision as needed.

The principle of working with everyone is also underpinned by equitable service delivery. Currently for children and families in the NT there is unequal and inequitable access to universal, secondary and targeted services, based on first language, remoteness and different cultural values and approaches. This often results in services being inaccessible for many First Nations children and families in the NT. Unlike most Australian children and families, many First Nations people do not have access to services or engage in learning and wellbeing in their first language. This creates one of the greatest barriers to effective engagement, service delivery, empowerment and improved outcomes.

When resourced and supported appropriately Aboriginal Controlled organisations and services are well placed to engage, hear from, respond to and be led by a whole community. As a result of stolen generations and missions since colonisation many First Nations people have been forced off their traditional lands and into larger remote communities as regional centres. This has established communities where often many different First Nations clans and family groups live in remote communities across the NT. In some areas Aboriginal Controlled organisations are managed by one family group which has the potential to create service access barriers and the exclusion to others.

The CG Approach is designed and funded to achieve equity so that all children and their families have access to what they need as they need it. The CG Approach goes beyond universal equality and delivers universal equity. This is achieved by ensuring that funding allocations resource prevention and responsive service delivery based on individual child/family needs. It ensures that First Nations staff are representative of all family groups within the community. It also ensures that staff have flexibility in delivery to engage and work with everyone. Therefore, staff are not hindered by strict service output targets, rather they have the flexibility to work with children and their families at their pace and based on their immediate and long-term needs and priorities. This is critical to an outcomes-based funding and delivery model, rather than a focus on outputs only.

Capturing the collective voices of all national jurisdictional and local community and family voices is paramount – this means not only hearing the voices who are already known and active. This will be the most effective way to ensure cultural safety and the practical functionality of any funding framework and service system. The role of First Nations people in program and policy development should not be limited to only scoping and program development, but must extend into delivery, leadership and evaluation as well.

In community: Place-based where children and families live

Services need to be placed where people live. They need to be accessible, responsive and engaged with the people they serve. Place-based approaches are core to community development and empowerment and need to operate in and with community – where children and families live, grow, learn and develop. Place-based delivery cannot encompass multiple communities or large regions because they are about people's place, their neighbourhoods and their local social and cultural capital.

The NT is unique to the other states and territories of Australia. There are over 500 communities of less than 200 people⁴ and each population has distinct Nations and Clans. The high number of communities with small population makes place-based service delivery challenging but not impossible. However, it is not a new challenge and will not be overcome if funding models continue to focus on and resource attracting and training a western workforce to work in remote communities, rather than genuinely investing in supporting and building a local First Nations workforce.

This Productivity Commission appears to be including a service and funding mapping exercise. This should include funding and service delivery at all levels of government. It should provide a transparent understanding of the amount of funding and service delivery available in communities, and the extent to which access and delivery is place-based and contributing to building social, cultural and economic capital in communities.

Mapping should include a particular focus on service funding and delivery to children and families living on homelands and outstations – they are often the forgotten and ignored Territorians because they choose to improve their physical, social and emotional health and wellbeing by living on their traditional lands. There is no clear understanding or documentation available about homelands/outstations service delivery across the NT. Families should not experience service access barriers because they live on their traditional lands.

Some health and education outstation/homeland service delivery models have been trialled and failed, and each time have resulted in families and communities being pushed to move off their traditional lands and into remote centres. Governments cannot continue to develop policy that states a commitment to and respect for First Nations culture and practice without providing equitable service delivery to homelands and outstations – and effective service delivery to homelands and outstations can only be achieved with community-led service design and delivery with a local First Nations workforce.

Children's Ground is designed so that all children who live in communities where economic poverty and social injustice, exclusion and disadvantage are prevalent can grow up with the opportunities that most Australians enjoy: a high-quality education locally; a sense of identity and place for themselves and others; being surrounded by creativity and their cultural life; access to high-quality health promotion and prevention; economic opportunity where they live; and having access to and agency over a range of opportunities that support their human rights, culture, safety, learning, health, economy, skills development, fun and celebration.

⁴ Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2016.

<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/3218.0Main%20Features752016>

In the CG Approach, the social, cultural and economic capital of community life is built through the engagement of a critical mass of people who mobilise to change the life course for their children. Strong community governance, employment and ownership is central to achieving this.

Children's Ground is also trialling and evidencing an outstation cluster service delivery model which enables people living on their traditional homelands to have equitable access to core education, health and social services, as well as social and economic opportunities.

Delivering services in remote areas is expensive and challenging, and regrettably, the analysis of 'value for money' often looks at short-term outputs rather than the long-term outcomes in human capital and positive social and economic participation.

Innovation - combining the best of the old and the new (privileging culture)

In many communities across the NT, where a significant majority of the population are First Nations people whose first/second/third/etc language is not English. Despite good intentions and significant efforts, First Nations communities are often subject to services, programs and people which can be foreign in design, language and culture. Across NT remote communities, key child and family services are largely being delivered by non-First Nations people, in English and within Western education, health, economic and social practice frameworks.

Child and family services are rarely designed with the consideration of first culture, language, law and society. For many this has seen children and families systematically excluded from service systems for generations, due to explicit and implicit structural, social, cultural and relational barriers. Non-First Nations staff are often short-term and changeable. Access to basic foundational services in first language that are commonplace in mainstream Australia are often lacking.

The distrust of services by many First Nations people is understandable. We cannot expect people to engage in services that are not in their first language, that do not respect their cultural beliefs and that operate within structural parameters that are not understanding of or conducive to their circumstances.

The small populations of many remote communities mean it is possible that local service systems can be designed with the community and focused on long term, preventative approaches that recognise and engage people's strengths and abilities and begins from their first language and culture.

The CG Approach combines local cultural knowledge systems and leading international and national evidence and practice. The following key knowledge and practice systems are integrated into all delivery and systemic structures:

1. Local cultural systems of knowledge (First Nations pre-colonisation)
2. First Nations Leading practice post-colonisation
3. Leading practice globally across cultures

This ensures that first language and cultural knowledge systems, responses and approaches are privileged as core elements in all service delivery and embedded within employment and community governance structures.

Culturally safe and appropriate service delivery is an important factor across all elements of service delivery and systemic structures – and culturally safe service delivery can only be achieved when the service workforce reflects the language and cultural values, knowledge and approaches of the community. To achieve this, Children's Ground's employment model sees First Nations staff working alongside Western trained and remunerated equally for their cultural and western knowledge and expertise. This enables children and families to engage in learning, health and other services in their first language and ensures that local service provision and workforce brings together the best of cultural and western knowledge systems and approaches.

Children's Ground is evidencing that it is possible to work with communities to create a service system that privileges First Nations language and culture to secure the long term social, cultural, economic and political wellbeing of First Nations communities.

Assume and celebrate ability - strength based

Current systems and services are 'problem' oriented and are perpetuating the complexity of issues people experience because they cannot have their needs met by a coordinated and integrated system of services. As new problems are identified and create political pressure points, more siloed programs and services are created in response. Political cycles mean that governments are reluctant to create large scale change, even when they recognise things are not improving.

For over 230 years both intentionally and unintentionally, governments have perpetuated the trauma experienced by First Nations people as a result of colonisation. This is now embedded generational trauma and is a daily lived experience for many. First Nations peoples have clear aspirations and strategies for achieving change within their communities – and they begin with ensuring their children and the next generation are strong in their identity, language, kinship, culture and history. Aboriginal Controlled organisations who are led by their community have the greatest potential to bring cultural knowledge systems and practices into current service systems of health and education. Many Aboriginal Controlled organisations are delivering services and supports within Western practice frameworks only. While cultural safety in service delivery is partly achieved when people can access services in their language from a workforce that reflect their values and culture, access to traditional cultural knowledge and practices (i.e. bush foods, bush medicines, learning on traditional lands and traditional healers) is critical to cultural safety and to people's continued connection with the approaches that have been effective for over 60,000 years.

Funding Aboriginal Controlled organisations and the community to deliver both First Cultural and Western knowledge systems of health, education, social and economy, should be a priority for both levels of government. Re-wiring policy to privilege First Nations culture and be responsive is difficult within the current deficit system. However, it is critical that child and family services and human and economic service systems more broadly completely reform the way they work with First Nations communities and what service delivery looks like.

Rather than being seen as recipients of services with problems that need solving, people should be considered as designers and delivers of services. Children's Ground is designed as a way of implementing a system that places the people in the centre with a 25-year strategy for whole of community equity and opportunity. As an intergenerational approach it considers works with the strengths and needs of people pre-birth through to elders.

The CG Approach provides space for children, families and the community to enact their cultural traditions, approaches to learning, health, wellbeing, society, law and safety. It provides the space for people to demonstrate, find and build on their strengths through employment, community and cultural leadership and as active participants. This approach is replacing a history of problem-focused, isolated and crisis-driven programs with environments and engagement that focus on people's interests, strengths, culture and abilities.

Expect and deliver the best: Excellence in delivery and evidence of effectiveness

There have been minimal visible changes in service funding and delivery since the Royal Commission report in 2017. Many of the changes being implemented in response to the Royal Commission's findings were already earmarked as NT Government key priorities in early childhood and family support. In policy documents released in response to the Royal Commission there was a distinct lack of a focus on prevention and any acknowledgment that building on cultural and social capital within First Nations communities and families as an enabling strategy. This is in contrast to decades of research across sectors into the long-term impact of prevention and cultural strength and identity.

Funding continues to be allocated to the same programs, organisations and government departments, without clear (or any) monitoring and evaluation and accountability for evidence of effectiveness. There are federally funded early childhood and family support programs that are now entrenched as part of the fabric of the NT service systems that have never been evaluated for process effectiveness or positive impact and improved outcomes. The lack of accountability attached to some federal and NT government long-term funding and programs is negligible. The need for robust and transparent monitoring and evaluation and accountability for funding is evidenced by minimal progress made in the NT after 11 years of Closing the Gap programs and funding.

Policy directions and funding allocations cannot be separated from implementation quality of services and programs evidenced by local and jurisdictional evaluation of effectiveness and impact. Funding needs to be tied to evidence of high-quality service delivery and achievement of short, medium and long-term outcomes. Service evaluations and accountability need to involve service users and communities. Funding accountability also needs to provide scope for learning, review and responding to service and program evaluations. Some currently funded programs are de-funded when they don't meet targets and KPIs, without an understanding of process effectiveness building blocks to achieving outcomes. Other programs and services don't have any real accountability to targets and are not evaluated effectively or in any way. We need evaluation that covers both process and impact of programs and services. Evaluating the process of a program or service is critical and as important as impact and outcomes evaluation because implementation matters – it is what makes the differences and what contributes to achieving impact and improved outcomes.

In relation to the long-term impact of effective child and family service delivery in the NT, there is a scarcity of rigorous evaluation being undertaken. Governments and service providers in the NT and the rest of Australia are needing to continue relying on overseas research that is decades old and conducted in vastly different contexts. We can no longer rely on overseas evidence and service delivery models. We need to invest in generating evidence of local approaches that are led and evidenced by First Nations people and communities.

Child and family service delivery in the NT should be leading the country in best-practice related to engaging, responding to and working with First Nations communities. Yet, both levels of government continue to invest in prescribed and packaged solutions. We need to start backing and supporting our First Nations communities to design, deliver and evaluate their own solutions because this will enable the users to hold the child and family service system and funders to account.

What is considered an 'evidence-based program' also needs to go beyond those with international evidence only and the 'gold standard' randomised control trials. Evidence needs to be generated from the ground up with action research and evaluation frameworks that provide the pathways and resources for small local programs to be supported to evaluate and share their findings. In First Nations communities across the NT there are examples of great practice being designed and implemented by First Nations people, yet they are largely unseen or learned from by governments and policy makers because they do not have an avenue or voice into academic or policy making arenas.

A distinguishing feature of Children's Ground is an embedded First Nations led 25-year longitudinal evaluation in each community with which we work. The CG Approach is generating evidence with First Nations people to understand the impact, not only of participation in early childhood education and health promotion, but also the relationship between this and wrap-around family support; for family engagement in their children's learning, child and family engagement in health and social/emotional wellbeing services, in employment, as well as the impact of community empowerment and privileging First Nations culture and knowledge systems - all of which are key social and cultural determinants of health and wellbeing.

Communities we work with have a range of indicators of change for Children, Families and Community across nine outcome areas that include health, education, culture, safety, and economy. Short and medium progress indicators are measured as building block to long-term measures and outcomes. Measurement includes a combination of standard western measures, consistent with the Closing the Gap targets, as well as culturally relevant measures.

Teams of First Nations Community Researchers lead local evaluation and research priorities, including daily monitoring and evaluation and identifying research priorities. First Nations people generating evidence about the impact of Children's Ground is imperative, as key to their leadership of the CG Approach locally. Our evaluation is also a critical contribution to the Australian evidence-base in relation to how First Nations people lead research and evaluation locally and at a jurisdictional and national level.

An NT child and family services funding and delivery framework needs to focus on both short and medium-term outputs, measured by how they map and build towards achieving long-term outcomes. This will not necessarily be easy because it will require services, systems and funding models to function in a very different way to how they currently do. Outcomes-based funding and delivery can only be achieved when services are community-led and when staff have the flexibility required to be responsive and provide holistic support.

It requires moving away from funding that is attached to siloed service targets and outputs, and towards collective and shared accountability across services for a system of outcomes-based funding and service delivery. This can facilitate an environment for effective integrated service delivery that incorporates shared measurement and accountability for outcomes rather than outputs.

Collective outcomes and shared accountability for measures across services can compel organisations to work together in the interest of the people. Funding, systems and practice frameworks need to be embedded in a child and family service public health funding decision-making and implementation framework. This can create the conditions to ensure an organisation places the people at the centre of the system, without risking their financial viability. Evaluation needs to occur in relation to the impact of programs and the extent to which the service system is achieving effective integration and shared accountability.

Stay for the long-term: Comprehensive sustained funding and commitment

For children, families and communities which find themselves the most excluded and economically disadvantaged in our society – for whom current service systems are often inaccessible – engagement, leadership and sustained change requires long-term, consistent and continuous investment and commitment.

Competitive and short-term funding allocations means often services are forced to focus on survival - being reduced to competing for funding for siloed programs that allow them to deliver only specific and discrete outputs, rather than long or even short-term outcomes. Too often this environment means that organisations are adjusting to fit government priorities for financial survival rather than community priorities and outcomes.

Currently, governments and services hold the power and dictate terms - not the people who are affected by the decisions and determinations made about them rather than with them. A shift in power and longevity of funding and commitments is required at all levels of government and service provision, including policy making, funding frameworks and service providers and partners.

A commitment to long-term pooled funding and a shift in power and decision-making is needed to create sustained change in communities who have been generationally disempowered and excluded, culturally and systemically. This can shift disempowered First Nations people from a position of exclusion to one of inclusion in decision-making, service delivery and self-advocacy.

Therefore, Children's Ground is a 25-year approach and operates within a 'collective investment' funding model. Funding partners contribute to achieving outcomes rather than outputs alone. Funding models can create the environment for effective outcomes-based integrated service delivery by moving away from funding that is attached to service targets and outputs.

For Children's Ground this has enabled implementation of a service and community governance approach that provides the space to build individual and community agency and distribute the power across the community through local decision making, ownership and leadership development. Putting power, decision making, service design, delivery and evaluation in the hands of First Nations people is critical for developing confident and capable leaders for current and future generations of First Nations people. It is the foundation of a long-term approach and commitment.

Many child and family services are reliant on financial stability and sustainability through competitive funding grants or funding continuations or extensions. Services and organisations often experience significant delays that create financial uncertainty and result in programs and services being put on hold or staff let go with an inability to fund delivery during the period of uncertainty. Staff turnover as a result of organisational/service financial uncertainty disrupts positive

relationships that exist between service and people in communities which Children's Ground (and local service partners) have found to be a significant enabler and foundation for engagement in services and supports.

While there is a place for competitive tenders at times, shared funding allocations and agreements between local services can bring a range of relevant universal and secondary services together who can collectively support children and families in a coordinated and integrated fashion. Joint or shared funding agreements can include all services and supports relevant to a specific community – decided by the community. It can bring together all services that are required to support families and communities to provide environments for optimal child development that ensures cultural identity is privileged and service access and delivery is equitable based on the unique needs and priorities of each community.

In many places there is a drive and passion for collaborative service delivery that puts children and families at the centre, rather than services at the centre – and there are pockets of good practice occurring where dedicated practitioners go above and beyond to achieve it. However, without the authorising and enabling environments within their organisations/services to work in a collaborative way, dedicated practitioners can only achieve so much for so long. Most services are reliant on government funding to survive and are unable to afford their staff the flexibility to be responsive and put children and families at the centre. They are limited by the need to meet targets and tick 'service output' boxes to maintain or secure government funding. This means they move further and further away from genuinely engaging with people and being able to respond to their priorities.

Summary and Recommendations

Children, families and communities deserve excellence in service delivery and support, and funding mechanisms and allocations should demand and compel service systems to deliver excellence - especially for those who are amongst the most disempowerment and socially, economically and politically excluded within society.

This can only be achieved in the NT if there is a fundamental shift in current approaches to policy development and systems funding. The 'fix' is not simply putting more money into programs but instead to ensure the programs respond to the cultural, emotional, social, and geographical realities on the ground, and are led by the people they intend to support. Rather than expecting people, their worries, daily circumstances and geography to adapt to the will of funding mechanism, it is time to begin creating a holistic funding framework and service system that provides equitable and responsive service delivery in and with First Nations communities, not delivering to them. This can only truly be achieved by listening, supporting and working alongside communities to create environments that are empowering, privilege first language and culture, and are healthy and safe.

Extreme disadvantage, economic poverty, social exclusion and child harm are preventable. The solution is not just about what is funded and delivered, it is also about how services and systems are funded and delivered. Children's Ground has found that by placing the power in the hands of the people, communities mobilise to determine the future for their children and their families.

An NT Funding and Systems Delivery Framework should:

- Have shared/joint community-based funding models, measurement and accountability across all levels of government and relevant service providers within an area/community.

'Relevant services' are defined by communities. Funding agreements and allocations need the flexibility to include and bring together what services each community deems relevant for their children and families. Funding needs to be tied and accountable including transparency regarding how much of allocated funds hit the ground and purposes for which they are intended.

- Allocate system and service delivery funding and resources that enable, not limit community decision-making and governance processes and that can include everyone in local decision-making, not just the usual active voices.
- Creating funding structures that promote/require collaboration of services towards long term outcomes, standards and delivery consistent with the Children's Ground strategic framework
- Prioritise funding to organisations that are First Nations led and controlled and that have evidenced community leadership in service design, delivery and evaluation, and who can deliver both First Cultural and Western knowledge systems of health, education, social and economy.
- Ensure that shared accountability (funding and measurement) and organisational structures provide the authorising environments to encourage, enable and compel services to integrate planning and delivery, and to support community in the design of a local service offering that is holistic and responsive to children and families over a sustained period of time.
- Allocate funding and resources proportionally to prevention, early intervention and treatment, which should result in increased funding for prevention and health and wellbeing promotion, rather than treatment and response alone. A reorientation of current and long-standing patterns in funding proportions needs to occur.
- Continue to fund the necessary secondary and tertiary services that are underpinned by a universal service base focused on primary prevention and delivered with the principle of universal equity, rather than equality alone. This will be a challenging change for government funders, policy makers and many service providers - but the status quo tells us that this is a necessary change to stop perpetuating the cycle of funding the outcomes of disadvantage rather than addressing the cause through a focus on social and cultural determinants. Real and sustained change is unlikely without this significant shift. There will need to be significant additional funds towards prevention while still being able to meet current needs.
- Allocate flexible community-based funding that enables First Nations employment with flexible and variable hours contracts. Organisational human resources and payroll systems need to be an enabling condition for First Nations employment. This can build a local First Nations workforce over the long-term and affords First Nations people the right to engage in essential services that are culturally safe and in their first language, as most Australians do.
- Coordinate Australian and Northern Territory Government funding to provide a comprehensive suite of child and family services, avoiding unnecessary duplication and administration between levels of government.
- Community-based funding across multiple services and sectors requires clear, fair and simplified funding agreement and contract management processes that maximise funding spent on children, families and communities.
- Be transparent in decision-making, funding allocations and include embedded process and impact evaluation from the beginning of all programs and service delivery. Decision-making

for new and continued funding should be based on evaluation and evidence of effectiveness across short, medium and long-term progress indicators that include community direction. Government and service accountability for funding allocations and delivery should be transparent – they should be accountable to and held to account by each community.

Through the development, high-quality implementation and rigorous monitoring and evaluation of such a framework, it is possible to build a policy platform and funding approach that enables genuine place-based community decision-making, service delivery and evaluation models that are replicable with local adaptations. Cost efficiency and effectiveness can be achieved in the short and long-term if resources are proportioned and allocated to the right points within a service systems design, delivery and evaluation.

Significant and sustained generational change will not always be evident in numbers from the outset. Funding decisions must look beyond outputs and hard numbers alone and towards outcomes and evidenced change over time. Robust monitoring and evaluation need to measure effectiveness and success against longitudinal evaluations, driven by community that closely monitors the quality of service delivery and gradual progress and impact over time towards the long-term outcomes.

In response to the current broken systems that have been struggling to create positive reform and change for First Nations people, Children Ground was established as a whole new approach to evidence how outcomes can be improved by allocating funds to the right contact and service points within systems. In stark contrast to current service systems, the CG Approach resources prevention and early intervention to provide the strong foundations of culture, learning and wellbeing that children and their families need to secure long-term equity.

Currently, data indicates that very few are benefiting through improved life outcomes from current investment in child and family services in the NT - with minimal changes in education, health, social and economic outcomes reform across the NT. It is only by securing the consent, support, and active involvement of communities, in the governance, design, delivery, and evaluation of responses, that governments and services can provide the enabling conditions and contribute to enduring change for children, families and communities.

The Northern Territory is unique in culture, demographics and environment. The longest living cultural knowledge systems and social systems are fundamental to any effective service for children and families. Any new model must understand the intact and complex cultural systems lived by First Nations people. An understanding of the lived experiencing of systemic racism and barriers, as well as enablers and success are critical to inform the future of services in the Northern Territory if they are to deliver the long-term outcomes that children and families deserve. Service organisations do not represent communities, they are servants and service communities. It is the voices and the lived realities of the people to whom we are accountable and who hold the answers to how services system can best be delivered, structured and funded.



Appendix one

Children's Ground

An introduction

An introduction to Children's Ground

Introduction and background

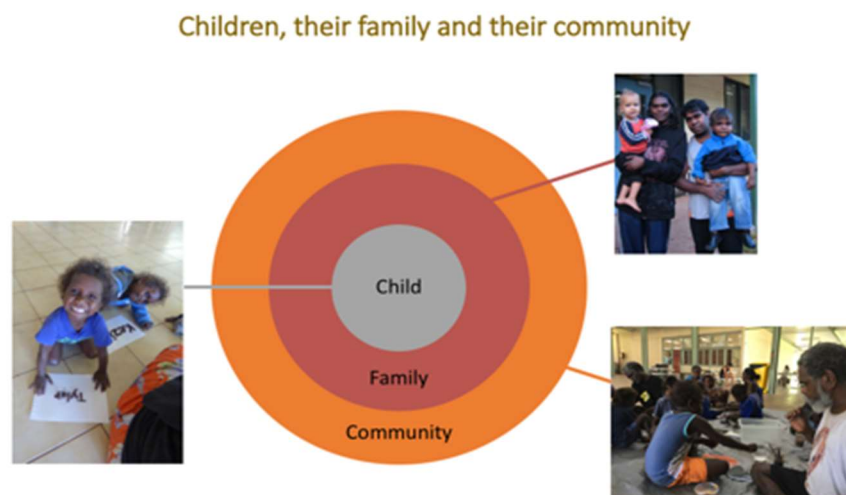
Children's Ground (CG) was born out of the deep injustice and hope of Aboriginal people living in the unacceptable economic poverty and inequity in Australia. People have endured generations of violence and trauma that has been perpetuated through the process of colonisation, taking form and shape in different ways over 230 years but ever present in the lives of people today.

Children's Ground was designed with Aboriginal people to respond to a system that has failed not only First Nations peoples but all children and families who are experiencing extreme hardship. It recognises that all children are able but it is the conditions within which people are born and raised that will determine their opportunity and choices.

Overview - Children's Ground

Children's Ground is a new system developed to respond to the social, cultural and economic determinants for long term wellbeing of children and families, where intergenerational poverty and inequity are devastating.

Children's Ground has responded to key failings in the current system and has five reform areas: Governance, Workforce, Investment, Evidence and the Integrated Service Platform. The integrated services platform encompasses the areas of Learning and Wellbeing, Health and Wellbeing, Culture and Wellbeing, Employment and Wellbeing and Economic Development and Wellbeing.



Every child has the right to exercise their brilliance.

Children's Ground is the first organisation of its kind in Australia. We have designed a system to effect real change with communities where every child and family experiences profound challenges.

Children's Ground works across whole communities experiencing intergenerational trauma and entrenched and extreme socio-economic stress. Where we work, every child and family faces complex and extraordinary hardship, impacting on their education and their future. Every child we work with faces the likelihood of hospitalisation by the age of two. Many will have hearing loss and other physical and health barriers that impact on education and future wellbeing. Family death is

common. Most witness (and some are victims of) violence. Unemployment or underemployment is common in their families. Many face a common trajectory that will result in one or more of the following; long term disability, incarceration, subject to child protection, mental health issues include depression, anxiety and suicidal behavior, early death. Most will be exposed to serious alcohol and other drug use. Nearly all will be living under the poverty line and experience overcrowding or homelessness. Through their life they will experience racism and will face cultural barriers in a range of areas that will exclude many of them from education, employment and other opportunities.

All of the children we work with speak English as a second third or fourth language. Their first culture is an Indigenous culture and one of the First Nations in Australia. They are raised within the laws and customs of their first culture. These laws and customs differ from Western traditions and systems. The children and the families continue to practice and recognise these laws and knowledge systems.

The current mainstream social, educational and economic systems are not equipped or designed to work with children who face complex social-economic disadvantage challenges and cultural minority status. These challenges are compounded and more complex for a child from a First Nation culture and language. For example, children we work with have not had early childhood learning opportunities and are not engaged or are failing in the mainstream education system. Mainstream systems respond to these children and their families after problems arise and apply a deficit approach. They focus on crises and remedial responses rather than focusing on prevention and creating opportunity and access.

Arising from three decades of experience and leading practice, Children's Ground is designed to reform both education and the systems that sits around the life of the child, family and community. Leaders in our organisation who are First Nations, are the ultimate experts in the situation that faces their people.

Families want the next generation to enjoy a better future. Given the issues are community wide, working on a case management reactive model (current system) will not change the status quo. Instead we work with whole communities to shift them from environments of complex socio-economic disadvantage to communities where opportunity and wellbeing are the norm. We work with a critical mass of children and their families to create long term change. We work with the child, in the context of their family and community. We believe in and harness the ability of the community, responding to their cultural landscape, and social and economic environment. High quality resources, people and services build on local strengths and capacity to break the cycles of fractured service delivery and intergenerational economic poverty to equip children for opportunities locally, nationally and globally. We assess the economic landscape and implement pathways for children so that they can succeed. The outcome is for a child to have a strong sense of identity and internal wellbeing, with the knowledge and skills for their local and global reality. If enough children across a community enjoys this reality, the community will change over time.

The Children's Ground Approach responds to the key determinants recognised internationally as underpinning health, education, wellbeing and economic independence. Extreme disadvantage and economic poverty are preventable. The system of CG is a system of prevention for whole communities. It is designed to prevent child trauma, risk and removal, incarceration, ill-health, early death, family violence and unemployment. It is designed to achieve equity so that all children can grow to adulthood and enjoy opportunity, express their talents and be included and contribute to society. It is designed so that all children can grow with a sense of identity and place for themselves and others, with access to quality health, wellbeing, education and economic independence.

Underpinning change in each of these social determinants across whole communities are the dual principles of self-determination and human rights.

People who live with extreme social and economic disadvantage have less choice, less opportunity and less political voice. A key design of Children's Ground is to create the environment in which people have choice, are provided with the key information and resources to exercise this choice and are then supported to be the key agents of change. This empowerment approach is necessary to achieve any change.

Inclusion and safety are expected within a Children's Ground environment. While creating an environment of empowerment, how this empowerment is exercised is critical. As a community placed based approach, self governance means the voice of all people within that community are regarded as important, while still recognizing local governance structures. This requires shared understanding, sophisticated communications and decision making processes that are transparent, inclusive and collective. Empowering people in their decision making requires strong enduring principles that adhere to basic human rights for all.

Children's Ground is informed, though not limited, by the leading national and international experience. Children's Ground aims to inform leading practice to achieve the eradication of extreme economic poverty and celebrate social, cultural, political and economic inclusion.

As a 25 year approach, Children's Ground has short term targets that are the building blocks to long term change. Reaching these targets, the first being quality early childhood, are a necessary precursor to future targets being met. As a result, implementation is staged, monitored and evaluated. This allows the setting of short term realistic operational and financial goals within an ambitious agenda.

Children's Ground is a system that can be implemented by any organisation or group of organisations including in partnership with Government services. The system is designed to achieve sustained long term change with whole communities facing extreme inequity. The long term strategy is for the system to be adopted as the mainstream Government approach backed by evidence and delivering economic efficiencies and social and cultural outcomes.

Children's Ground: Reforming the System

Children's Ground has created a reform agenda to achieve long term wellbeing for all children and families through access to quality education, employment and health, and celebration of social, cultural and economic inclusion. The system is underpinned by three reforms, that all inter-relate: systemic, strategic practice principles and service reform.

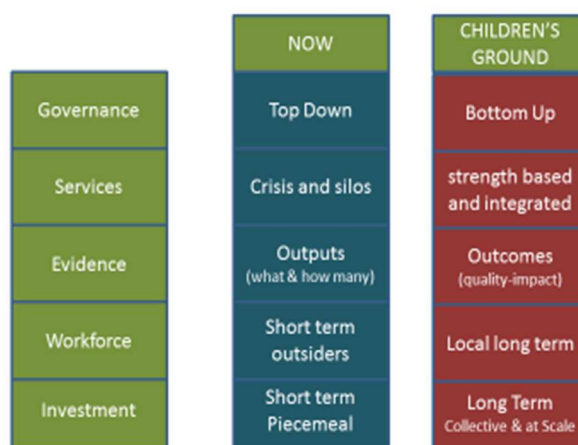
Systemic Reform

To change the status quo Children's Ground has reformed five key areas to redress the current system failings, and to evidence a new system to achieve long term impact.

The five key areas are:

Children's Ground has redesigned each key part of the system

- **Governance:** community/user ownership and direction at the service delivery level & transparent and robust organisational governance at the strategy level; blending formal corporate governance with strong local community governance.⁵
- **Approach (services):** Our *Learning, Wellbeing and Development* platform is an integrated approach to delivery that supports the individual, family and community (see below Service Reform)
- **Evidence:** A longitudinal study, across a generation to evidence impact, guide development and ensure that a commitment to gather, act on and share evidence of the educational, social, health, economic and cultural impact of our work.
- **Workforce:** Creating a high quality, sustainable local workforce; a workforce where cultural and community experts work alongside sector experts; ensuring the approach is informed by the local and international best practice expertise.
- **Investment:** An outcome based collective investment from community, government, corporations and philanthropists enabling innovation and flexibility to deliver change and provide long term secure funding.



These reforms are the pre-conditions required to a system of equity, inclusion and quality.

⁵ Strategic Review of Indigenous Expenditure, 2010 stated: *A clear message from the recent past is that policies and programs must be targeted to local needs, in close engagement and active partnership with the people they are designed to assist...Key challenges to effective service delivery include: identifying a range of suitable governance and decision-making processes that effectively balance the variety of Indigenous governance styles with governments' responsibilities for properly managing public funds. These governance approaches should be designed to empower Indigenous people and communities, including equipping them with relevant skills, so that they can progressively take meaningful control of their futures.*

Strategic Practice Principles

Children's Ground is a generational approach, underpinned by nine strategic practice principles, all of which are instrumental to achieving change:

Principles

Start early	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Begin in the early years• Maternal, early childhood & sexually active young people• Prevention focus in all that is delivered
Stay for the long term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• pre-birth to 24 years - all major risk transition periods• Build whole of community change across a generation• Long term economic, social and cultural wellbeing
Child, family & community led	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Governance by local people who design, delivery & evaluate• Family are fully involved• Place based and intergenerational approach – delivering where and how people live
Critical mass (work with everyone)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support and know all children and community members• Engage enough children and families (critical mass) to enable wide spread shift from inequity to opportunity
Assume and celebrate ability (strength-based)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recognise the ability of children, families and community and build upon this strength• Recognise the First Cultural knowledge and expertise• Responsive to each child and family and community
Deliver the whole, not the bits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Integrate <i>Learning, Wellbeing and Development</i> incl. key areas of education, health, governance, culture, society (community), employment, enterprise and wellbeing.• Intergenerational and placed based
Innovation –the best of the old & the new	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Combine both the old and the new to create innovation• First Nations knowledge systems• Leading practice & global innovation
Expect and deliver the best (excellence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recruit and train a high quality workforce• Provide the best resources and services to deliver quality• Expect/encourage the best of all people• Meet key human rights instruments & principles
In community (place-based)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Delivering where people live• Bringing everyone together where people live.• Building upon the social, cultural and economic capital for the whole community

Community agency is the single most important principle and practice in our model. It is only by securing the consent, support, and active involvement of the community, in the governance, design, delivery, and evaluation of responses, that enduring change will be achieved.

Service Reform

Service Reform looks at how we integrate key service and operations. It relates directly to one of the key Systemic reform areas and Strategic practice principles, *Integrated Approach*. It is about what we do and how we do our work with community, families and children.

Our *Learning, Wellbeing and Development* platform has five operational areas:

1. Learning and Wellbeing (Education)
2. Family Health and Wellbeing (Health)
3. Community Development and Wellbeing (Society, Governance, Culture and Environment)
4. Economic Development and Wellbeing (Employment, Training and Enterprise)
5. Cultural and Creative Development and Wellbeing (Embedded across the other four areas)

The Children's Ground Integrated *Learning, Wellbeing and Development* platform tackles the social, structural and economic determinants and inequities that currently underpin the devastating life experiences of children living in communities of extreme economic poverty. We respond to the multi-level influences on children's development and life from pre-birth to 25 years.

In simple terms, we make sure children and their families have the sort of opportunities that most Australians enjoy: a quality education, creative and cultural life and agency in their health and wellbeing. This approach is place based, allowing communities to shift from having little or no access, to having agency over a range of opportunities that support culture, safety, learning, health, economy, skills development, fun and celebration.

Children's Ground combines local cultural knowledge systems and leading international and national evidence and practice. We bring together this evidence, contextualise it and integrate it with cultural knowledge to shape innovative opportunities that are congruent with the aspirations of parents and their community.

The service system is designed to create a safe environment for children and families. This is achieved by regarding and respecting the individual as well as their culture and identity. The culture and identity of a child is fundamental to their learning and wellbeing.

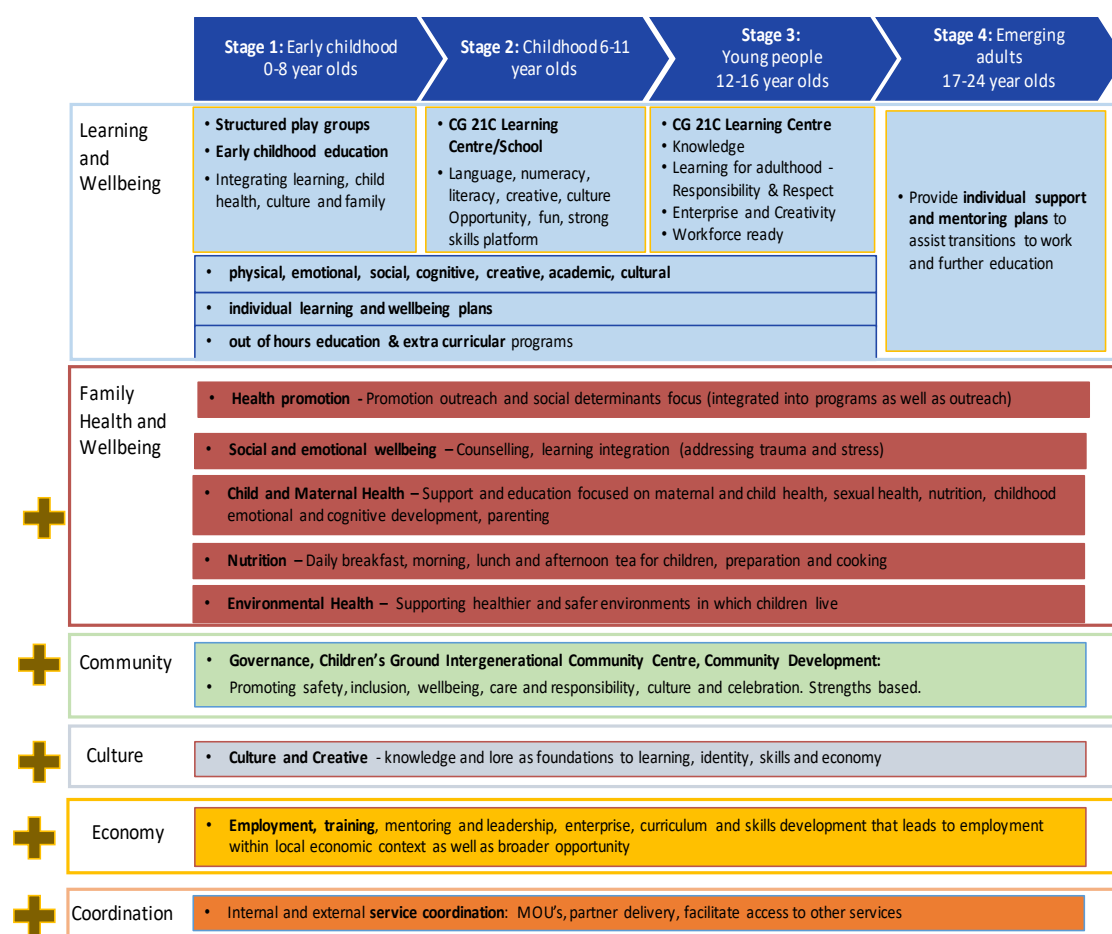
We recognise that the Aboriginal world view connects the development of the person to the land and the people in a sophisticated system that combines education, health, wellbeing, society, law, philosophy, environment and culture. This is known by different names in different Aboriginal nations and languages.⁶

The approach integrates three knowledge and practice systems:

1. Local cultural systems of knowledge (First Nations pre-colonisation)
2. First Nations Leading practice post-colonisation
3. Leading practice globally across cultures

⁶ Altyerre (Arrernte), Jukurrpa (Walpiri), Tjurkurpa (**Pitjantjatjara**), Man-garre (Kunwinjku), An-garre (Gundjeihmi).

Children's Ground Learning, Wellbeing and Development platform



Community Engagement and Planning (Walk Talk and Act)

The first phase of any work requires community engagement and planning which can take six to 12 months. This is a process with the community, to listen and determine both the interest and ability to partner for long term change. Children's Ground will only work where we have an invitation and agreement with the local community and key decision makers for the region, as well as a shared vision. The community engagement process leads to a decision by the board and the community to move to implementation of Stage 1 of operations and a five-year strategic plan.

Children's Ground 25-year approach



Appendix 1: High Level Outcome, Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

Key outcome measures sit under each of the nine high level outcomes with progress indicators across a 25-year trajectory

	An environment created with families and communities that realises their aspirations for the next generation of children - to be free from trauma and suffering, to enjoy equity and safety and be able to grow into adulthood happy and healthy, and with agency over their social, cultural and economic future.								
	Children and young people				Family		Community		
Aspirations	Children are thriving-engaged in life, brimming with laughter, pride, confidence and opportunities				Families feel strong, supported and confident about their children's future, feel valued, and are involved in their children's to learning, wellbeing and development		Communities care for each other and provide a safe environment for every child. They enjoy economic, cultural and social strength and opportunity.		
Outcomes: Level 3	Children are healthy	Children are happy	Children know their history and feel confident in their cultures	Children have the knowledge and skills for life and learning and are creative problem solvers	Families are involved in their child's learning, wellbeing and development	Families are socially and economically strong	The community values its place and heritage and continues to grow	The community enjoys employment and economic opportunity	The community is safe, inclusive and respects diversity
Outcomes: Level 2	Sustained (and frequent) participation in activities			Sustained (and frequent) employment at Children's Ground			Development of community capacity to guide, inform and co-deliver Children's Ground platform		
Outcomes: Level 1	Participation of children and families in activities				Engagement in employment at Children's Ground				
	Children's Ground platform								
Outputs	Supportive and acceptable services in place								
Activities	Learning and wellbeing	Family Health and wellbeing		Cultural development and wellbeing		Community development and wellbeing		Economic development and wellbeing	